

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 L-03 H-01 NSCE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1618

INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS PRIORITY

USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 2399

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, SREF, EK, GB

SUBJECT: EQUATORIAL GUINEA REFUGEE SITUATION

REF: STATE 219749

1. FOLLOWING RESPONSES KEYED TO LETTERED QUESTIONS PARA ONE REFTEL:

A. (1) ESTIMATED 60-70,000 EQUATORIAL GUINEAN (EG) REFUGEES IN GABON LIVE IN APPROXIMATE CONDITIONS OF GABONESE RURAL AND URBAN POOR. PREPONDERANCE ARE FANG ETHNIC GROUP WHO ARE FAIRLY READILY INTEGRATED INTO GABONESE FANG STRUCTURE IN RURAL WOLEU-NTEM PROVINCE ADJACENT TO EG BORDER. SECOND LARGEST ETHNIC GROUP, BANGA, TEND TO BE CONCENTRATED NEAR COCO BEACH AND CAP ESTERIAS. ROUGHLY 5000 EG REFUGEES LOCATED IN LIBREVILLE. HOW WELL OR BADLY OFF REFUGEES IN URBAN AREAS ARE DEPENDS UPON WHETHER THEY ARE ABLE TO BE DOCUMENTED FOR AND OBTAIN WORK. THERE ARE NO REFUGEE CAMPS PER SE IN GABON. (2) AS EXPLAINED TO US BY UNHCR RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE, HCR GOALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY ARE FIRST, TO OBTAIN ASSURANCE THAT EG REFUGEES ARE NOT SENT BACK TO "INSTANT DEATH" SENTENCE IN EG; SECOND, TO ORGANIZE GABONESE SERVICES TO PROVIDE REFUGEE DOCUMENTATION INCLUDING TRAVEL DOCUMENTS TO EGS;
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AND THIRD, TO PROVIDE LIMITED SOCIAL SERVICES INCLUDING SCHOOLS, HELP IN GETTING JOBS, RESETTLEMENT, ETC. UNHCR REP FEELS ALL THREE GOALS BEING MET ALTHOUGH PROVISIONS OF SOCIAL SERVICES IS AT BARE MINIMUM LEVEL THUS FAR CONSISTING CONSTRUCTION OF FOUR CLASSROOMS AND THREE DOCUMENTATION CENTERS. ACCORDING TO FIGURES AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY, UNHCR ALLOCATIONS TO GABON WERE APPROXIMATELY \$50,000 IN 1976; \$100,000 IN 1977; AND \$240,000 IN 1978. (3) AS

EG REFUGEES ARE NOT IN CAMPS IN GABON AND NOT BEING FED OR HOUSED
UNHCR REP HOPES HIS INVOLVEMENT IN PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES
WILL CONTINUE TO BE MINIMAL. WE AGREE WITH HIS APPROACH.
APPROPRIATE MODEST ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION FROM US WOULD BE
PROVISION OF HALF A DOZEN OR SO SCHOLARSHIPS PER YEAR.

B. EMBASSY MAINTAINS CLOSE TOUCH WITH UNHCR REP, RESPONSIBLE
GABONESE AUTHORITIES, OTHER INTERESTED DIPLOMATS SUCH AS
SPANISH, CAMEROONIAN AND FRENCH, AND REFUGEE GROUPS THEMSELVES.
UNHCR REP PROVIDES CONTINUING ANALYSIS EG REFUGEE CONDITION AND
WOULD BE IN BEST POSITION TO PROVIDE OR DEVELOP ADDITIONAL DATA.
SO FAR AS WE AWARE, NO STUDY PER SE HAS BEEN DONE ON EG REFUGEES,
BUT GIVEN THEIR STATUS IN GABON, UTILITY OF STUDY BEYOND
WHAT UNHCR NOW DOING WOULD PROBABLY BE MARGINAL.

C. ALTHOUGH GABONESE WERE FOR SOME TIME RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT
UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE FOR FEAR OF DAMAGING RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT
MASIE, BONGO ASKED FOR UNHCR REP IN JULY 1977 AND INCUMBENT
ARRIVED IN NOVEMBER. PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 1977 UN ASSISTANCE TO
REFUGEES WAS CHANNLED THROUGH UNDP. AT LEAST SINCE TIME GOG
CONCURRED IN PRESENCE UNHCR REP AND DESIGNATION OF EG REFUGEES,
IT HAS APPARENTLY NOT POSED IMPEDIMENTS TO WORKING WITH REFUGEES.
GOG HAS MOVED TO ESTABLISH DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES FOR REFUGEES
AND FACILITATE WORK OF UNHCR IN OTHER WAYS.

D. SEE PARA A (3) ABOVE.
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E. AS INDICATED ABOVE, EG RENIGEEES HERE ARE DOCUMENTED BY UNHCR,
PVO'S TO THE CONTRARY.

2. IN SUMMARY, EG REFUGEES IN GABON THOUGH NUMEROUS ARE NOT
READILY RECOGNIZABLE. THOSE IN RURAL AREAS LIVE AS WELL OR
POORLY AS GABONESE AMONG WHOM THEY RESIDE. ACCORDING TO OUR
DISCUSSIONS WITH VARIOUS REFUGEES AND WITH UNHCR REP, PLIGHT OF
EG REFUGEES IN LIBREVILLE AND OTHER URBAN AREAS IS SOMEWHAT MORE
DIFFICULT IN RECENT MONTHS FOLLOWING ECONOMIC RETRENCHMENT
DICTATED BY GOG AUSTERITY POLICY AND CONSEQUENT DIMINISHMENT
IN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES. NEVERTHELESS THERE IS NOT A GREAT
DEAL BEING SPENT ON REFUGEES AND WHILE ADDITIONAL FUNDS MIGHT BE
EFFECTIVELY UTILIZED WE AWARE OF NO PRESSING NEEDS NOT BEING MET.

3. FYI- COINCIDENTALLY, LOCAL PRESS HAS JUST REPORTED ARRIVAL IN
LIBREVILLE OF FORMER BRITISH MILITARY ATTACHE (IN BRUSSELS,
INTER ALIA) PETER TOWNSEND, WHOSE ANNOUNCED PURPOSE IS TO
STUDY SITUATION OF EG REFUGEES IN GABON, PARTICULARLY CHILDREN,
IN PREPARATION FOR PUBLISHING BOOK NEXT YEAR IN CONNECTION WITH
INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S YEAR ON STATUS OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN
VARIETY OF PLACES. TIENKEN

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